

Recently you may have seen several inaccurate articles by internet journalists who got this exciting **College Park** story wrong. **This article in the Sunday, 9/1/2024 AJC, by Sara Gregory, gets it right!** Click on the article below to read it on the AJC's website.

While on Council, and prior to the RFP being published for the pod pilot project, I (AWC) walked the GICC parking lot and proposed several possible routes between the GICC

Skytrain station and the Arena, my **preferred route being along the north edge of the parking lot** where it would be visible from Camp Creek Parkway. I felt that would be a great advertisement for College Park and the Gateway Center, particularly with the addition of the pedestrian bridge (finally coming this Fall). If the pilot was successful, I suggested a spur crossing Camp Creek at the entrance to the Convention Center, running north along Conley Street (between the rental car lots),

## Self-driving pods to ferry airport passengers

Program explores innovative transit at Hartsfield-Jackson.

By Sara Gregory  
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A San Francisco-based technology company is bringing its fleet of driverless pods to Atlanta. Called Glydcars and made by a company called Glydways, the podcars are coming as part of a long-planned pilot involving the ATL Airport Community Improvement Districts and MARTA to explore alternative and innovative transportation options at

the airport. The self-driving pods will connect the airport SkyTrain to the Georgia International Convention Center in College Park – not the Atlanta Convention Center 10 miles away in downtown Atlanta. A national media outlet confused the two event spaces in a report last month, prompting Atlanta City Council President Doug Shipman to clarify at a council meeting last week that the vehicles aren't coming downtown. Such a route would duplicate MARTA's red and gold lines, which already take riders from downtown



San Francisco-based company Glydways' self-driving pods will connect the Hartsfield-Jackson airport SkyTrain to the Georgia International Convention Center in College Park. COURTESY OF GLYDWAYS

Glydways continued on B5

### Glydways

continued from B1

town to the airport. Instead, this pilot program is designed to fill in gaps in the transportation network that exist around the airport and in the south metro area as a whole.

A recent study found Atlanta airport employees have commutes that are nearly double the metro average, and public transportation isn't an option for many workers with overnight or early morning shifts when MARTA buses and trains aren't in service. The personal rapid transit pilot with Glydways is one of several mobility efforts being pursued by the airport Community Improvement Districts to improve transportation options.

"This project has immense potential to revolutionize future mobility options in the airport area," Airport South Board Chairman Steve Berman said in a news release.

Autonomous transportation systems are not widely available in the U.S., but Glydways and other tech companies say such networks could one day be an alternative to heavy or light rail. A few self-driving systems operate overseas in London, Abu Dhabi and Korea. The people-mover on West Virginia University's Morgantown campus has operated since the 1970s and is one of the most well-established systems.

The Atlanta project is the third that Glydways is undertaking, none of which are operational yet. The company, founded in 2016, is also involved in projects in San Jose City and East Contra Costa County. MARTA General Manager and CEO Collie Greenwood and several board members took test rides in the pods during a December 2022 trip to California.

The first phase of the airport project is a demonstration designed to show off the pods, and will function as a test to see how well personal rapid transit



The Glydways pilot program is designed to fill in gaps in the transportation network that exist around the airport and in the south metro area as a whole. COURTESY OF GLYDWAYS

can meet the area's needs. In the future, a route that wraps around Hartsfield-Jackson's domestic and international terminals and to big employers like Porsche Cars and Delta Air Lines is envisioned, along with a separate leg that runs into Clayton County.

But for now, the self-driving cars won't be going far. The pilot involves only the construction of a 0.49 mile dedicated guideway on which the Glydcars will run. The route will take people from the SkyTrain to a station at the convention center and then continue to a second station at the Gateway Center Arena.

Riders use an app to request a Glydcar. The pod, which can fit four adults or a family of six, then comes to a loading bay to pick up passengers. In the dedicated lanes, Glydcars can go up to 30 mph. Ashley Jaber, a spokeswoman for the airport CIDs, said up to 10 Glydcars will be involved in the pilot, which is expected to

be operational in fall 2026 and will run for two years.

Officials have previously estimated the project will cost \$20 million, half of which Glydways is expected to cover. MARTA has invested an initial \$1 million and has committed up to \$10 million over five years, a spokesman from the transit agency said this week. Other partners in the project, which include the ATL Airport CIDs, College Park and Fulton and Clayton counties, will cover the remaining pilot program costs.

Self-driving pods have been floated by Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens as a possible alternative to light rail planned for the Beltline, but the MARTA spokesman said it's premature to say if the agency would integrate autonomous vehicles anywhere into its system in the future.

"MARTA is always open to exploring new, innovative modes of transit, especially when it comes

to providing 'last mile' solutions that connect into our larger system," spokesman Payson Schwin said. "It's important to note that while we are always exploring new technology, MARTA relies on tested and proven rail and bus technology to carry its millions of customers safely where they need to go."

Glydways has pitched itself as a modern transportation solution. "Our ability to transform urban transit with our high-capacity, cost-effective, and sustainable system is a testament to our team's dedication and vision and our customers who are demanding better and different transit solutions," CEO Gokul Hemmady said in a statement.

Capacity is one of the main concerns when it comes to the feasibility of autonomous rapid transit compared to light or heavy rail. Glydways officials have said its systems can move 10,000 people per hour, a rate similar to trains.

A spokeswoman for the company did not respond to a request to elaborate on how that ridership figure was determined. With four riders in a pod, at 30 mph, it would take at least 82 Glydcars to move 10,000 people in an hour.

Besides being on-demand and available 24/7, the pods are also appealing to many because they allow riders to travel privately. In an FAQ on its website, the company answers the question: "Do I ever have to share a vehicle with a stranger?"

"No. Never." That option is a fundamental difference between Glydways and existing public transportation systems but one that Glydways says is sought after by customers.

"Glydways believes that such a revolutionary transit experience will create demand for more transit usage as well as strong ridership retention," the company said in a handout.

Jaber, the ATL Airport CIDs spokeswoman, said current transportation options fall short particularly with regard to the first- and last-mile connections between transit and jobs.

Around 157,000 people work in a 6-mile radius around Hartsfield-Jackson International, either at the airport or in transportation and warehousing facilities. More than 63,000 people work at the airport alone, and commuting issues are one of the top complaints from employers.

In a 2022 survey, more than 10% of workers at the airport said they don't have access to reliable transportation options. Among employees making less than \$50,000, 15% said they have to use Uber or Lyft to get to work.

"This pilot is just one piece of a broader strategy to tackle some serious transportation challenges in the south metro area, especially for the local workforce – many of whom are historically overlooked and underserved and for whom this pilot will be a critical resource," Jaber said in a statement.

eventually joining the pedestrian path from the bridge (possibly elevated above), and ending up near the College Park MARTA station. That way people could walk from our downtown MARTA, cross the tracks, get on a pod near the Corner Grill, and travel directly to the Arena, without having to go to the airport and transfer to the Skytrain. I also envisioned future spurs going to the Golf Course and other points in Six West.

**Thus walkways and Personal Rapid Transit would link Gateway Center, Six West, and Downtown in a synergistic, eco friendly way.**